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TIEN FENG FOR 1955 (Cont'd)

Tien Feng during the second half of 1955 was running a series of articles on newly built churches. Three of these were Baptist, one in Shanghai, one in Soochow and one in Hsinghua (Canton). One is Church of Christ in China (Canton) and one Methodist (Hsinch'ang, in Shanghai District). The other new churches mentioned are all of indigenous sects: two of Spiritual Work Fellowship, both in Shanghai; one of Spiritual Food Church, in Soochow; and a True Jesus Church in Tingchi, Huaiying County.

The foundations of the Baptist Church in Shanghai, referred to above, were laid in 1947, but the building was not completed until 1953. The article states that between its dedication in April 1953 and the time of this article (September 1955), the church had conducted six baptismal services, in which a total of 117 persons had been baptized. Its weekly activities include: women's society, men's society, Bible class, inquirer's class and prayer meeting. During the summer of 1955 a series of special meetings was held, in which 125 persons signed their names as inquirers.

Several church regional meetings are reported to have taken place during these months. For the Church of Christ in China, the Tsoup'ing District in Shantung held a district meeting in May, and the Kiangnan Synod met in August. This was before the realignment of synods along province lines. The report states that the meeting had been delayed because the Executive Secretary of the Synod, T'ang Jen-hsi, had been opposed to the Three Self Movement. He is not mentioned again. The new Executive Secretary was David Chu.

In the Episcopal Church, the Shantung Diocese held a meeting in May. The July 11 number gives an illustrated account of the consecration of Ting Kuang-hsin and of the two suffragan bishops for Fukien in the Shanghai Church of Our Saviour on June 19. Chao Fu-san, who was already Executive Secretary of the North China Diocese, was ordained in September.

The South Mountain Baptist Church in Dairen reports that in the past two years it had baptized 105 persons. A Chinkiang report gives accessions in the various churches there as follows: Church of God 14 baptisms on August 14; Methodist Church two received by baptism and six on probation; the Baptist Church reported a number of inquirers who would shortly be baptized.

The Christian Literature Society announces the publication of a new book, a book of sermons by Rev. Peter Han, of Nanking Theological Seminary. It also advertises two different anti-Wang Ming-tao books.

An account of a meeting of the Christian Union of the city of Sian states that it was attended by representatives of 23 different organizations.

Issued bi-weekly to keep mission boards and missionaries informed on Christian work in China. Information from Chinese church magazines and other Chinese sources is passed on as objectively as possible, with a minimum of interpretation. When interpretation is necessary, it is enclosed in parentheses as the comment of the editor. ANNUAL RATES: Domestic, $2.00; Overseas, Firstclass $4.00, Secondclass $3.00. Airmail $5.00 in 15¢ zone, $7.00 in 25¢ zone.

TOURING CHINA'S CHURCHES

This is the title of an article by Y. T. Wu in the January number of China Reconstructs. He begins by speaking of the tours of inspection he has made in the last two years, especially in Anhwei and Shantung provinces (See Bulletin for March 18 and September 16, 1957, where however it is not stated that Y. T. Wu had anything to do with the Shantung visit). He says, "Some of the churches with which we came into contact in the rural areas of the north were simple to the point of primitiveness. Housed in the home of a believer or of the preacher himself, the place of worship often possessed no more than a few benches and a small table. On festivals, when there was a larger congregation than usual, they would meet - weather permitting - in the courtyard, sitting on the ground. The preacher, often unpaid and making his living as a farmer, might be barely literate, with little or no theological training. Yet the churches were managing to carry on."

He then gives several examples of successful country churches. "In the small town of Fuyang, Anhwei, we were pleased to find two Christian groups flourishing - a former China Inland Mission church and one of Seventh Day Adventists. The preacher at the ex-C.I.M. church is a practicing herbalist who devotes all his spare time to religious work. Sunday services at this church drew congregations of between 500 and 1,200 people according to the season - most of its members being farmers who had to walk several miles to worship. The Seventh Day Adventist Church was smaller, with an attendance varying from one to three hundred. Here the preacher was a young woman with only elementary theological training. In both churches the number of baptisms has increased year by year since the liberation."

Another example referred to is the village of Chailou in Shantung, where "the Christians we visited had so distinguished themselves in work that one of them, Chao Tsun-yueh, had been elected head of the village, head of the agricultural cooperative and a 'model worker' of the entire county for three years running. This oneness with the people not only wins respect for Christians but helps the growth of the Church."

He concludes from his experience that it is not true to say that "Christians in rural districts have less religious freedom than those in the big cities." If at times there are irregularities, they are no more than are to be found in other areas of life, and are almost always corrected at once when reported. Some of the difficulties are the fault of the Christians themselves. "In one town of Anhwei, when the people were doing their utmost to fight a flood, the pastor said, 'This flood is a punishment sent by God for our sins; do nothing, for the end of the world is at hand.' Another pastor in the same place compelled a sick relative to stop consulting the doctor and resort to prayer alone. The sick person died. Such actions by Christians naturally arouse the indignation of the people, for they make religion appear to be an anti-social force."

He then turns to the city churches and says of them, "Conditions there are normal, and there are even signs of growth....Attendance varies at different churches according to the quality of leadership. On the whole, it has gone up steadily since liberation. The Sunday School at the Bethel Church in Swatow is worth special mention. Its children's division has 23 classes, 65 teachers and over 600 children. The adult division has 80 members, with ten teachers in eight classes. In addition there are nine Bible classes for women, with 150 members, and ten classes for men, with over 100 members. Altogether over 900 men, women and children receive religious instruction in this one church on a Sunday morning before service - which usually has a congregation of over 1,000."

His travels have impressed him with the comparative strength of rural churches in the south. He thinks this may be due to the fact that the area has been less fought over during the recent wars (the editor would add another probable reason, that they are older churches). "Take for example the 21 churches and their chapels in the 'Upper River' district of Chekiang Province. These reported an increase of 813 members in the last few years, bringing the total number of believers up to 4,000."

He next takes up the Three Self Movement, explains what it is and why it was necessary, and stresses the new-found sense of independence within the Christian churches. He then ma a significant statement about relations with Christians abroad.

"Our stress on independence does not imply that the Three Self Movement is in any way anti-foreign, or that the Chinese Christians want to cut themselves off from their co-religionists in other countries. No group of Christians could do this without losing something spiritually very precious, which can only be gained from a world-wide Christian brotherhood.

"It must be said, however, that the relations between Christians of different countries with different political systems and ideologies cannot but be hampered by the fact that leading international Christian organizations seem to identify themselves with the interests of one group of nations as against other groups. In these circumstances it is naturally difficult for such organizations to serve as centers of a world-wide fellowship in which Christians can be united in a common search after the will of God and a common effort to follow their Lord Jesus Christ. It is hoped that the time will come when Christians from all countries - whatever their social and political systems - can meet together in love, understanding and mutual forbearance. Chinese Christians believe that fellowship between Christians can make a great contribution to world peace."

Finally he asks about the future of Christianity in China. What influence will the prevailing stress on Marxist materialism have on the church? He answers: "Let the Christian faith prove itself. If it is such a fragile thing that it cannot stand up in a critical philosophical environment, its death should be a matter of regret to nobody. But if it is the staunch, virile, life-giving faith that every devout Christian believes it to be, its vital testimony will always convince people because it meets the spiritual needs and eternal yearnings of the human heart. Indeed, a critical environment may help to search out those who profess the faith only in name - the seeds, in the words of Christ's parable, that fall by the wayside or on stony ground."

He maintains, however, that the social environment is not so unfavorable as the philosophical environment might seem to be, and insists that the Government has a genuine concern for the welfare of the Church. After their Anhwei tour, he says, "Our group listed 47 complaints made by religious workers in different places and brought them to the attention of the local or provincial authorities. We later received a reply from the provincial government department concerned, telling us exactly how each case had been settled." He concludes that Chinese Christians have grounds for optimism regarding the future. "They have faith in God and in the power and vitality of the Christian Gospels, in the wisdom and integrity of their people and their leaders, and in the socialist way of life as the best and only one for the Chinese people to follow."

THREE SELF MOVEMENT MEETING

In the December 23, 1957, Bulletin we reported that an enlarged meeting of the Executive Committee of the Three Self Movement was held in Peking beginning December 6. We now have more details of this meeting. It was attended by about 100 Protestant leaders. It pledged continued efforts to weed out counterrevolutionary elements within their ranks, and specifically denounced a group of Protestant leaders who had proclaimed that "the Communist Party has no faith in God and therefore is incapable of exercising guidance over religious beliefs or giving leadership to the churches." It is not stated to whom they were referring. Noting that leadership of the Protestant churches is divided, the representatives warned that the Communist authorities might adopt stronger measures to wipe out opposition elements among them.

Only a few of those attending the meeting were identified. One of these was Anglican Bishop Chao Fu-san of Honan. Chao Fu-san is a young man, recently ordained, who has been serving as Executive Secretary of the Hopei Diocese. If this report is correct, he has now been elevated to the episcopacy.

CHRISTIANS IN THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

We have reports of two speeches by Christians in the National People's Congress in Peking. On February 8 Y. T. Wu addressed the Congress, calling upon all Chinese Christians to work for the establishment of socialism, and to guard against imperialist efforts to provoke estrangement and division. In regard to the Government's policy of religious freedom, he said that Christians had not the least doubt about its genuineness.

He told the Congress that "some rightists have been revealed in the Christian Church who,